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Lawrence M. Principe, ed. *Chymists and Chymistry: Studies in the History of Alchemy and Early Modern Chemistry*. Philadelphia: Chemical Heritage Foundation; Sagamore Beach, Mass.: Science History Publications/USA, 2007. xiii + 274 pp. Ill. \$45.00 (978-0-88135-396-9).

The editor of this significant collection of papers opens his introduction by declaring that “alchemy is now a hot topic” (p. ix). As one of the scholars whose recent work has played no small part in demonstrating the importance of alchemy to a proper understanding of the history of science, Lawrence Principe knows whereof he speaks, and he is surely right. Not so long ago there was still a tendency among

mainstream historians of science to regard those who made claims for the importance of alchemy as all too obviously indulging in special pleading for their own idiosyncratic interests. Things began to change with the increasing realization that Newton's alchemy was not just a pastime, much less an aberration, but was a crucial part of his life's work with real ramifications and implications for his physics. Principe made his name by showing, effectively single-handedly in his *Aspiring Adept*,¹ that the same could be said for Robert Boyle's natural philosophy. Alchemical studies have come a long way since then, but as a comparatively new area of systematic and concentrated research, it remains an exciting and highly illuminating field, as this excellent volume clearly demonstrates.

There is no room to summarize each of the twenty-two papers, but suffice it to say that, although they average only twelve pages each, they are all of a uniformly high standard and are packed with information. Furthermore, they range over an incredibly wide set of themes, from spontaneous generation to materialism, from transubstantiation to mechanism, and so on. Indeed, the themes discussed are so wide ranging that even early-modern scholars who think that alchemy lies outside their interests should certainly consult this volume. As well as the "usual suspects," like Paracelsus, Libavius, Kircher, and Newton, this book also rounds up Cartesians like Cordemoy, Rohault, and Régis, as well as G. E. Stahl and Herman Boerhaave. Similarly, as well as considering Paracelsianism at the court of Henry IV of France, there are also papers on alchemical disputes in the University of Prague, the Académie Royale des Sciences, and even the Swedish Board of Mines. There are also two studies based on archaeological investigations into the equipment and apparatus found in early modern laboratories and a fascinating paper whose author, by paying serious attention to alchemical fraud, shows that not everyone accused of being an alchemical charlatan was a deliberate trickster—and that those who genuinely believed that they could succeed at transmutation were nonetheless condemned as fraudsters when they failed.

The wide sweep of this collection goes a long way toward offsetting the usual complaint against anthologies that the end result is patchy and fails to provide the kind of coherent and comprehensive treatment that a well-written monograph offers. Although each paper inevitably offers only a fragment of what might be said, taken as a whole they at least seem to point to all that would be required for a comprehensive treatment of the subject of alchemy. Indeed, the only significant aspect of alchemy that was not explicitly discussed here was what might be called "recruitment." It is clear from the recent scholarship on alchemy that there were large numbers of alchemical practitioners, but it is hard to know how they became interested in it and how they were able to become practitioners—it is not, after all, something you can do after simply reading a few books. Even so, this is an indispensable collection of articles. One of the papers brings out the fact that alchemists sometimes disputed (among other things) the issue of eise-

1. Lawrence M. Principe, *Aspiring Adept: Robert Boyle and His Alchemical Quest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

gesis—reading too much into a text (p. 38). There is so much in this volume that eisegesis seems impossible.

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